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JEW AS A PATRIOT

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THE JEW AS A PATRIOT

A PLEA FOR THE REMOVAL OF THE CIVIL DISABILITIES OF
THE JEWS IN THE TRANSVAAL

DISCOURSE DELIVERED
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
DECENNIAL CELEBRATION OF THE WITWATERSRAND
OLD HEBREW CONGREGATION,
IN THE FREEMASONS' HALL, JOHANNESBURG,
NOVEMBER 16, 1898.

BY

JOSEPH HERMAN HERTZ, PH.D. (COLUM.),
RABBI OF THE ABOVE CONGREGATION.

Bad laws must not be patched, neither must they be mended; they must be burned. In a free State, it is not the Christian that rules the Jew, neither is it the Jew that rules the Christian; it is Justice that rules. We want no liberties; we want liberty!

Leopold Zunz

REVISED SECOND EDITION.

JOHANNESBURG:
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TO
HIS HONOUR
S. J. PAUL KRUGER,
PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC,
AS A
MARK OF SINCERE ADMIRATION.

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IN all civilised countries the walls of the Ghetto have fallen for the Jew, never to rise again. The Sun has at last arisen, even for Israel, the Eternal Sufferer, the Martyr among the Peoples, whose Passion lasted thousands of years, upon whose kind was visited each crime that wakes in man the beast, "whose record is one cry of pain." This century has seen one after another of his enemies silenced, their malicious slanders, one by one, die away from the lips of men. The Sun of Righteousness has arisen, and all the ghosts of mediævalism have fled before the healing rays of his wings.

Still the Kingdom of Heaven is not yet. Prejudices die hard. The lover of humanity must record the sad fact that the prejudice against the Jew is, alas, particularly hard in dying. The volcano of hatred and calumny, which we, a generation ago, believed forever to have spent its force, is not by any means as yet a dead volcano. Despite education, enlightenment, and the active participation of the Jew in every labour of humanity, dreadful rumblings are heard in this seemingly extinguished crater; and but too often does it spit forth its miasmatic lava. Only about a month ago, for example, the Christian population of Kossow, Galicia, attacked the Jewish quarter, with the result that ONLY ten Jews were either burned alive, stoned, or beaten to death. In the most enlightened countries even, it seems that Anti-Semitism, like evil, merely changes but cannot die. Anti-Semitism always fights with a strange weapon, and the strategy of its attack is ever new. It can no longer advocate the extermination of the Jew; fortunately there are to-day limits to human degradation. Neither can it long maintain its charge that the Jew is a traitor. For, even fickle France knows that the latest attempt in this direction is nothing less than a diabolic plot concocted by men who would be the greatest criminals of the age, if they were not its greatest lunatics. Of late, therefore, it has had recourse to a more subtle device. It attempts to assassinate the honour of the Jew, to make him ridiculous and then contemptible in the eyes of his fellow men.

During this recrudescence of the military spirit, both in the Old and New Worlds—when the virtue of courage is again become the cardinal virtue, and cowardice the one deadly sin—it never tires of repeating that the Jew is a coward. Owing to this sheer constant repetition this charge is believed to be true, not only in St Petersburg, Bucharest, and Prague – anti-Semitic storm-centres—but in London and Brussels, in Washington and Pretoria as well. Saddest of all, so ignorant are we of our own achievements, that Jews themselves often plead guilty to the charge.

To-night, ladies and gentlemen, when we have assembled to commemorate the day when the flag of Israel was, for the first time, unfurled under the fair, blue skies of the South African Republic, and recall the hour when the standards of our ancient faith were planted on the Witwatersrand, on a new soil, where, till that hour, Judaism was unknown, we might well inquire into the truth of this slander. From the bird's-eye view which this golden moment affords us, we see things as they *are* : and, perhaps better than ever before, shall we be enabled to learn what are our true relations to this Republic, as well as the true relations of this Republic to us, children of the House of Israel.

The statement that the Jew is a coward is one that will not bear a moment's investigation. Few men, unless they be hopelessly insincere, but will pronounce it absolutely silly. The Jew a coward? why, it is a contradiction in terms. The Jew, who has suffered all things, endured all things, resisted all things for an idea, an ideal, a hope—a coward? “Yes, these were the old Jews,” is the retort, “those fine fellows, the Jews of the Middle Ages. But you are a different race now. What Jew cares for, or suffers for, ideals *now*?” Well, I can only refer to the prominent non-Jewish writer, E. B. Lanin, who declared that if one-tenth of the special laws directed against the Jews in Russia were applied to the Russian Greek-Catholics, it would be enough to convert the whole population to Shintoism or Brahminism in a week!

“ Coward? not he who faces death,
Who singly against worlds has fought,
For what? A name he may not breathe,
For liberty of prayer and thought.”

We would not pursue the subject any further, if we would not know that, in reality, this slander is but an ill-concealed attempt to impugn the patriotism of the Jew. It will, therefore, still

more clear the atmosphere on this subject of courage and cowardice, if we learn the definition of patriotism, and whether the Jew can meet this definition ; its tests and proofs, and whether he can stand these tests and proofs. "The final test of patriotism," says President Paul Kruger, "is the willingness to fight for your country, to die for it." Now, in order that I be not accused of phrase-mongery, of darkening the truth with words, mere words, I will hasten to call your attention to a few facts, which are eloquent enough forever to silence all our enemies. I do not choose these facts from the story of the Transvaal Jew ; because Transvaal Jewry is but ten years old, and ten years in the sight of the Eternal Jew " are but as a day." And since I happen to be more familiar with the story of the American Jew than with that of the French, German, or Italian Jew, I will consult the pages of the history of our glorious sister Republic at the Antipodes. There I find that from the 12th day of October, 1492, when Luis de Torres, one of the five Jewish sailors on board of Columbus' vessels, cried Land ! land !—down to the 15th day of February last, when thirteen Jewish boys lost their lives on that noble battleship " The Maine," destroyed in the harbour of Havana, there is not a movement in that land of the brave and home of the free, to which the Jews have not, in men or money, contributed their share and more than their share. In the War of Independence, 120 years ago, although there were at that time only some 700 Jewish families in the whole country, Benjamin Nones organised a Jewish regiment in Philadelphia. Moses Gomez tried to get a commission to do likewise in New York, and when this was refused him on account of his age, being then over sixty-eight, he indignantly answered, " I can stop a bullet as well as any younger man ! " Is not such a sentiment worthy to be enshrined for ever among those memorable utterances which humanity can not afford to let die ? In the great Civil War between the North and South, we find 7,213 Jewish soldiers enlisted in the North alone, of whom ten per cent. were wounded, killed, or died in prison—a percentage equalled by no other section of the American population. While in the Spanish-American War, the echoes of which have not yet died away, we find that the Jews, especially the never sufficiently ridiculed Russian Jews, furnished more than double their share of volunteers. Over four thousand furloughs were granted by the Washington authorities to such soldiers as desired to celebrate Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur at home ! And, most striking tribute of all, Col. Theodore Roosevelt, now Governor of the Empire State of the Union, a non-Jew, who in the recent conflict was at the head of the Rough Riders, declares that in that gallant company

which was the admiration of the world, the most astonishing courage in all that company of heroes was displayed by the seven Jewish Rough Riders. Now, just as we have fought and conquered before Manilla, fought and died before Santiago de Cuba, we have fought and conquered, fought and died, on every battlefield of the century. We have fought at Leipsic and Waterloo; under Kossuth and Garibaldi; before Sebastopol, Sadowa, and Sedan. The first soldiers that stormed Plevna were Roumanian Jews, and the generals on both sides, during that wonder-event in military history, Jewish generals. In the last war between Turkey and Greece, the first soldier to receive a wound was Giuseppe Misan, a Jew; and the first sailor to fall in Cuban waters, a Jew. If suffering and the endurance with which it is borne are tests of heroism, and if the willingness to fight and to die for your country are proofs of patriotism, then can indeed Israel challenge the heroism and patriotism of all peoples.

But it is the eternal glory of Judaism that it teaches the Jew not only to die for his country but also live for his country. While the Jew has poured out his blood like water on a thousand battle-fields, the greatest triumphs of the Jew are triumphs of peace, his industrial conquests.

That "Israel's mission is Peace" received striking corroboration from a most unexpected quarter on this sub-continent. Owing to the large number of Jews in the first rush to the diamond fields in 1871 there was not in those mining camps that dreadful reign of the bowie-knife and bullet, that murdering in cold blood, which characterised the early days of California even at their best. As for his industrial conquests, it is not easy to exaggerate the share in the awakening of this continent which is due to the enterprise, the commercial instinct, the dash and the daring of the South African Jews. For, the current belief to the contrary notwithstanding, Jewish immigration did not wait for the discovery of the diamond fields and gold fields. Jews began to come over in the twenties; and before Kimberley was, Jewish congregations were scattered over this sub-continent. And there is not a town in the interior but owes to the Jews its foundation or its early establishment as a trading and commercial centre. The halo of romance shines over the whole story. From Bethulie to Bulawayo, from the Paarl to Pretoria, you will everywhere find the Jew the pioneer of industrial progress. Just as the Jew started the tobacco trade in Cuba, the sugar industry in Barbados, the vanilla trade in Jamaica, to say nothing of older countries, we find that ever so many South African industries were started and developed by

Jews. The most useful work, Zangwill truly remarks, which Israel has recently been doing, is in the unnoted form of colonisation. The Jew is everywhere, pioneering, and building up States. And say what you will, commerce and diffusion of civilisation are most closely allied. The time will therefore come when the services of a De Pass to the whaling, sealing, and guano industries; of Andrade in establishing the ostrich feather industry; of Mosenthal in establishing the wool and hide trades; and of dozens of others, the "town-builders," the pioneers of Griqualand, Matabeleland, and Mashonaland, will be honoured no less than their fellow-Jews, Captain Joshua Norden, shot at the head of his troops by the Kaffirs in '47, and Lieutenant Elias de Pass, who so gallantly fought in the Kaffir war of '49.

We are patriots in time of war, but we are also much more than that. Consult the pages of history and see how largely the Jew, who forms only one-half of one per cent. of the earth's population, looms in the annals of human civilization: how he is bound up with every noble effort, every high ideal, every development of science, literature, and art. We have fully earned for ourselves that higher title, the nobility of which humanity does not as yet comprehend, patriots in time of peace. We love our country and we honour it. And our aim ever is to make it lovable and honourable.

And here we come to the real purpose of my discourse this evening. Because we hold that it is not only our duty to love our country and to honour it, but also to make it *lovable* and *honourable*; therefore, we most respectfully, would call the attention of His Honour, the President of this Republic, and of the Higher Raad, to one law that goes not well with the republicanism of any republic. I refer to the law by which Jews are disqualified from occupying any civil or military offices. Now I know that this law is practically a dead letter; and I would much rather live in Johannesburg or Pretoria, where I am subjected to a great many disabilities—on paper, than live in Paris or Vienna, where a Jew enjoys all the rights, privileges, and prerogatives of his fellow citizens—*on paper*. All honour to the sect that is better than its creed, and all honour to the nation that is better than its constitution. Nor do I forget those glorious words spoken on various occasions by the great Cincinnatus of the South, the mighty patriarch at the helm of this State: "If you are an honest and able public servant I shall never ask you what your religious views are." Yes, all very true; *but, there might arise a ruler who knows not Joseph*. In a new country, where errors have not yet had time to ossify into institutions with the halo of antiquity around them,

why should such prejudices be allowed to transmit themselves, like diseases, from generation to generation? Liberal interpretations, no matter how uniformly applied to these laws, are no adequate remedy, Fifty years ago Zunz, pleading for his German-Jewish brethren said, "Bad laws must not be patched, neither must they be mended; they must be burned. In a free State, it is not the Christian that rules the Jew, neither is it the Jew that rules the Christian; it is Justice that rules. *Wir wollen keine Freiheiten, wir wollen die Freiheit.* WE WANT NO LIBERTIES, WE WANT LIBERTY!"

I, for one, ladies and gentlemen, firmly believe that before long our country will free itself from this last, lingering remnant of barbarism, of religious persecution. I base my belief on the splendid traditions that hover over this land. I call to mind first of all the Dutch tradition, the Boers being of Dutch descent. It is fashionable to-day to belittle the part of Holland in the education of the human race. Yet Holland is the holy land of modern Europe, and should be held sacred. The Dutch War against Spain, that war against despotism over the body and over the mind, was a war, heroic, desperate, and second only to the Macabbean struggle in its infinite significance to mankind; a war in which humanity's highest privileges were again vindicated, and vindicated irreversibly. That little storm-vexed nook of North-western Europe became the asylum wherein were nurtured seeds of priceless value, the seeds of modern liberty. It repudiated the divine right of kings and of priests, and for all times established the principles of freedom of thought and religious equality.

The second great tradition in this country is the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Volumes would not suffice adequately to describe the debt of this country, as of all other civilised countries, to the influence of the Anglo-Saxon. Whether in England, in America, or in Australia, his contributions to civilization have everywhere been: liberty, in reality as well as in name, and irrespective of creed, class, or colour; equality and fair play to all men before the law; and the largest freedom of thought as well as the fullest religious equality.

And lastly, the strongest influence of all, the Hebraic tradition. If the Jewish people has been named the "People of the Book," there is only one other people that, in a sense, deserves the same title, and that is the Boer people. For generations, One Book, the Book of Books, was their only school, their only *predikant*, and very often—in the primeval solitude of the *veld*, in the awful loneliness and drear silence of the *Karoo*—their only companion

and friend. When they read of the "Great Trek" undertaken by the oppressed slaves of Pharoah 3,300 years ago : how they braved the unknown wilderness, with its jungles and serpent-bites and drought and starvation and disease, and, worst of all, the *assegais* of treacherous Amalekites, who spared neither infant nor aged, neither the fatigued nor the sick ; and how they, for a' that, came into the possession of the Promised Land, where they at last found rest—can we wonder that it seemed to them that it was their own lives that they read on the pages of this Divine Book ? that, with experiences so strikingly similar, they, likewise, deemed themselves under the special and peculiar protection of Providence ? And by loving that Book, by continually reading that Book, they acquired, it seems, many of the characteristics of the tribes whose story that Book unfolds. Like the Israelites of old, theirs came to be a sturdy self-reliance, and a resentment of injustice, wedded to a grim courage and a love of independence, all of which in time combined to endow them with a very genius for disobedience. The ideal life, to them, was in those days when there was no king in Israel and every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Again, like the Jews of old, the Boers never were boys ; never playful, joyful, or beautiful youths : they were ever men, grave and brooding and serious. The Boer people is the only one among whom the mother, like the Hebrew mother of old, took her child on her knees and taught it, "Be good, sweet child, and let who will be clever" ; and not the version of modern mothers, "Be clever, sweet child, and let who will be good." These pioneers and "Puritans and Pilgrims," these New Englanders of South Africa, these splendid anachronisms—alas, the infinite pity of it all that such should to-day be accounted anachronisms—had early learned the master-word of the Bible : conduct, character.

With it all, strange to say, the Boer has failed to imitate the Hebrew in one most important particular. The Israelites soon after their departure from Egypt, instituted the Festival of Freedom, when the novel principle was for the first time announced : "one law shall ye have for the home-born and the stranger that sojourneth among you !"

However, is it reasonable to believe that the Boer people, the spiritual heirs of the Hebrew, Dutch, and Anglo-Saxon races, will long fail to recognise that the Bible, in the words of the late Professor Huxley (an Agnostic) is the Magna Charta of human liberty, proclaiming freedom and equality to all the inhabitants of the earth ?

Rousseau has well said that the people of itself always wishes to do the right, but of itself it does not always see it ; the public will is always correct, but the judgment which guides it is not always clear.

But we ask : *When* will the people not only wish to do the right, but also see the right in this question of highest import to the dignity of thousands of its fellow-citizens ? Will to-night's plea for the removal of Jewish disabilities meet with a better fate than others that have at various times been made before it ? I cannot tell. Though I can remind you in closing of a sentiment which, to my mind, is even more important than any direct answer to this question. It was in the darkest hour of the American Civil War, when the cause of liberty seemed doomed to defeat, that a clergyman remarked to Abraham Lincoln : " I hope the Lord is on our side." " That does not trouble me," was the reply of the President ; " I am not in the least anxious on that point. The Lord is always on the side of Justice and Right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and my people be on the Lord's side ! "

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